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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 ADDIS ABABA 002032

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E  
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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: PARLIAMENTARY REFORMS DEMONSTRATE A STEP  
IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

REF: ADDIS ABABA 01743

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. In early 2006, the Ethiopian government, in conjunction with donors, commissioned international experts from four parliamentary democracies (United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, and India) to develop a set of parliamentary procedure reform recommendations for the Ethiopian House of People,s Representatives. The resulting proposals focused largely on creating opportunity for participation by minority parties and dispersing parliamentary procedural powers among parties. Though the ruling EPRDF called for roundtable discussions with opposition political parties on the implementation of the proposals, the two largest opposition parties refused to join forces at the negotiation table. The resulting package of reforms met international experts' recommendations, but not the ambitious opposition parties' objectives. The reforms represent a tangible example of the GoE addressing major complaints of the opposition that contributed to the November violence. END SUMMARY.

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EXPERTS DEVELOP 20 POINT LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS  
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2. (U) During the first quarter of 2006, former parliamentarians and parliamentary clerks from the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, and India were commissioned to analyze the Ethiopian House of People,s Representatives (HPR) rules of procedure. The project was undertaken because of severe opposition criticism that the rules had been changed by the ruling party during the session of parliament preceding the election of the opposition. The second reason was the Prime Minister's commitment to the USG and the Troika to continue the EPRDF dialogue with the opposition to address the agenda items raised by the opposition: parliamentary rules; rule of law; and the media. The goal of the analysis was to assess the rules of procedure and code of conduct and to recommend improvements to align them with international democratic standards. In order to develop their recommendations, they worked closely with the Speaker and Secretariat of the HPR to understand the most recent

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procedural rules and the new code of conduct implemented following the May 2005 parliamentary elections. Following the completion of the study, these experts issued a 120-page document that outlined best practices in each of their respective parliaments, as well as a set of 20 recommendations for the GoE to consider that would bring the HPR closer to internationally accepted parliamentary

procedures.

13. (U) The set of 20 recommendations addressed a number of concerns regarding involvement of opposition political parties in the legislative process. Currently, opposition political parties in the HPR hold 153 of a total of 547 seats, a significant increase from before the May 2005 elections, when the opposition held only 12 seats. Nevertheless, there is widespread recognition that the opposition has largely been procedurally marginalized in parliamentary agenda setting, despite its increased representation. The recommendations of the experts addressed this and other issues with the following suggestions:

a. Instead of the current 'Coordinating Committee,' which has no opposition representation, a joint working group which handles procedures and internal affairs should be set up, and should include representatives from all parties.

b. Form a proportionally-represented elders, committee to help prepare agendas, as well as oversee the administration and budget of the parliament.

c. Make a provision for additional Assistant Deputy Speakers--one or more of whom does not come from the ruling party--in addition to consider creating another Deputy Speaker position for the opposition.

d. Allow one of the important committee chair positions to be occupied by an opposition member. Committee chair and deputy chair positions should be distributed among parties, reflecting parties' relative representation. Committees should also be expanded to involve more parliamentarians.

e. Develop procedures to allow minority parties to

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participate in committees, so that committees function in a non-partisan manner.

f. Allow debate on opposition-proposed items at least one afternoon every two weeks.

g. Allow individual members to table motions or amendments to bills.

h. Allow all parties to debate the GoE,s plans for the upcoming year, following the PM,s statement. The opposition should be allowed to propose amendments and the discussion should end in a vote.

i. Allow a weekly question and answer session in which parliamentarians can address all GoE ministers.

j. Allow significant time to discuss the budget in plenary session, and allow budget expenditures to be considered in all standing committees.

k. Clarify requirements for parliamentarians to make public declaration of relevant financial interests

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GOVERNMENT CALLS FOR NEGOTIATIONS WITH OPPOSITION  
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14. (SBU) Following the completion of this study and review by the GoE, the ruling Ethiopian People,s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) met with opposition parties to discuss the experts, suggestions, prior to the bill's submission to parliament. The GoE intended that this meeting include all the major opposition parties collectively, including the Coalition for Unity and Democracy Party (CUDP), the Unified Ethiopian Democratic Force (UEDF) and the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM). However, when approached, the CUDP agreed, whereas a coalition of the UEDF and OFDM refused. Dr. Beyene Petros, the leader of the UEDF

party, told Charge that he felt they would get a better deal from the EPRDF if UEDF did not negotiate alongside the CUDP. When asked to elaborate further, Beyene was vague, but hinted that the CUDP would not be strong enough to pressure the EPRDF. In a meeting with opposition leaders on June 24, A/S Frazer and Charge urged the opposition parties to work together and focus on those fundamental issues included in the expert recommendations (reftel). Despite these suggestions, the opposition parties chose to negotiate separately with the EPRDF, rather than together. The CUDP, together with the EPRDF and its allied parties, held talks from June 19-21, and the UEDF and OFDM followed on June 22, 23 and 26.

15. (SBU) Following each party's round of talks, the two negotiating groups reported differing degrees of satisfaction on progress. The CUDP concluded their discussions with a formal agreement and a joint press conference with the EPRDF on points on which they agreed. In a later meeting with Poloff, CUDP party leader Temesgen Zewdie stated that, it would be wrong to say we got everything we wanted, but we made some gains.<sup>8</sup> This contrasts with the UEDF/OFDM round of talks, which finished without an agreement. However, not only were the UEDF/OFDM more inflexible in pushing for the key issues proposed by the experts, but they also chose to use the talks as a forum for proposing 92 separate points of their own, beyond those recommendations of the international experts. In the end, the UEDF/OFDM insisted on four key issues which were not met: 1) that the quorum to advance an agenda be reduced to 25 percent of the HPR (the percentage of seats occupied by the opposition); 2) that restrictions on their ability to visit their constituents be lifted (reftel); 3) that the power of the Speaker of the House be reduced; and 4) that the opposition have more input on HPR budget and financial matters. Despite the disagreement, local media reported that the UEDF/OFDM and EPRDF had reached consensus, which Beyene claimed was EPRDF "propaganda" intended to discredit the UEDF/OFDM before their constituents. Indeed when the reform bill was presented to parliament for ratification on July 5, the result was 264 votes 'for,' five 'opposed,' and 79 abstentions. From the opposition parties, most of the CUDP (including the leadership) voted in favor of the bill, while the UEDF and OFDM abstained.

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THE RESULT: A GOOD FIRST STEP,  
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16. (U) Following the approval of the parliamentary reform and code of conduct changes, Poloff met with Secretary of the Parliament Tesfaye Abera to confirm which international expert recommendations had been implemented. In reference to the international experts, list of recommendations above:

a. Though the 'Coordinating Committee' was kept, an additional Consultative Committee was created that will oversee the agenda setting. Though the total number of parliamentarians in the committee was not outlined, the bill did specify that the opposition should participate in proportion to their representation in parliament.

b. The administration and budget of the parliament will be handled by the Consultative Committee.

c. Nothing was specified regarding the creation of Assistant Deputy Speaker positions, which is inconsistent with the constitution.

d. A new 'Accounts Committee' was created, which will be chaired by an opposition party, with the mandate to oversee GoE expenditures. Additionally, the number of members in all committees was increased from 12 to 20. Nothing was specified in the bill about opposition members occupying chair or deputy chair positions in existing committees.

e. Despite the increase in committee members, nothing was specified in the bill regarding minority parties' participation.

f. The opposition will have one hour per month to forward topics for discussion in parliament, rather than the proposed one afternoon every two weeks.

g. The requirement for the forwarding of an agenda to the house floor has been reduced from 51 percent of votes to 33 percent. Individuals can forward an agenda through the Consultative Committee referred to in point 'a', but at least one-third of this committee must agree on the topic.

h. Nothing was specified in the bill regarding debate on the GoE's plans for an upcoming year.

i. A weekly question and answer session in which parliamentarians can address all GoE ministers was established. Questions must be submitted in advance and in writing to the Speaker. The opposition may question the ministers.

j. Nothing was specified in the bill regarding discussion time for budget in plenary.

k. Nothing was specified in the bill regarding parliamentarians declaration in public document of relevant financial interests

17. (SBU) Secretary Tesfaye stressed to Poloff that this is only the first step<sup>8</sup> in parliamentary procedural reform; many years were needed to reach the level of development in the parliaments from which the experts had come. He felt that this was a significant improvement and that, over time, the parliament would reach all of the recommendations, but that it cannot be done all at once.<sup>8</sup>

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COMMENT: NEGOTIATION A GOOD SIGN, BUT GOE COULD DO MORE  
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18. (SBU) The four parliaments that were reviewed all have different features. The Ethiopian HPR now meets all standards that are reflected in the four parliaments and all major recommendations of the experts. The GoE reached out to opposition parties in order to hammer out differences before a proposal reached the house floor. Some in the opposition grumbled that these negotiations, which were widely publicized in the local press, were simply an image play by the EPRDF. However, with three-quarters of the seats in parliament, the EPRDF and affiliated parties were not

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required to negotiate in order to pass a bill of their choice. It was less encouraging that, despite Post's repeated urging that opposition parties take advantage of this negotiation opportunity and work together to present a unified and cohesive front, the UEDF and OFDM chose to not coordinate with the CUDP. Furthermore, the UEDF and the OFDM chose to pursue an all or nothing, strategy towards the negotiations, rather than recognizing, as the CUDP did, that it is the first, but certainly not the last, time that the procedures will be discussed by parliamentary groups. Regarding the reforms that were passed, the GoE might have gone further, particularly on those points that sought to bolster minority party inclusion. The ruling EPRDF did provide more space for opposition parties to operate, thereby easing some of the current political tensions. However, as noted, more could have been accomplished and might have been had the opposition been more skillful and the EPRDF more flexible.  
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